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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MADRID 001072

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SP](#)
SUBJECT: SPAIN: ETA LOSES MORE KEY LEADERS, EXTENSIVE
SUPPLIES

REF: A. MADRID 775
[1](#)B. MADRID 707
[1](#)C. MADRID 499
[1](#)D. MADRID 272
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Classified By: ADCM William H. Duncan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Spanish and French security forces have re-doubled their efforts against the Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) terrorist group, following the high-profile, deadly and destructive attacks that ETA executed during July 29-30 to mark its 50th anniversary (Ref A). Joint operations since then have notched a string of notable successes, including the arrests of ETA's political leader (who doubled as the group's propaganda spokesperson), number-two military commander, logistics chief, and liaison with ETA members abroad as well as 10 Basque nationalist political figures aligned with ETA. Security forces also seized more explosives and other supply material in one week in August than at any other point in the past five years. This cable discusses recent key events in reverse chronological order. When viewed in the context of ongoing pressure against ETA (Refs B-H) since the formal end of its most recent ceasefire (2006-07), ETA faces a tremendous shortfall of experienced leaders and increasingly scant supplies. Post will provide Septel analysis on who's who among ETA's remaining leadership.

[1](#)2. (C) The domino effect of arrests is likely to continue as the most recent detentions - and a trove of documents seized as evidence - may lead to the identification and detention of still others. Meanwhile, in continuing its longstanding tit-for-tat relationship with the security services, look for ETA to respond to the recent arrests and seizures by conducting attacks where and when it can to buck up sagging morale and show the public it remains a force to be reckoned with. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

//Detention of Alleged Liaison with ETA Members Abroad//

[1](#)3. (SBU) French authorities, supported by Spain's Civil Guard (GC), on October 27 arrested Joseba Agudo, a longtime lawyer for arrested ETA members, in Hendaya, France. He is accused of being the chief of ETA's "Refugee Committee" and of passing along direct orders from ETA during his visits to numerous Spanish prisons and various travels to South America

and Europe. Agudo - whose role was brought to light through documents seized during the 2008 arrest of longtime political leader (2004-08) "Thierry" - reportedly encouraged ETA members who had fled abroad to return to fight for the cause.

//ETA's Alleged Political Leader/Chief Spokesperson Arrested//

14. (SBU) A combined unit of French police and Spanish GC on October 19 arrested ETA's alleged political leader, Aitor Elizaran, in Carnac, Brittany. Although the Spanish press initially provided conflicting reporting on Elizaran's exact role, Rubalcaba in a press conference that same day identified him as the highest-ranking official in ETA's political apparatus and a member of the group's Executive Committee. Longtime ETA military chief (2004-08) "Txeroki" reportedly was influential in appointing Elizaran as political chief shortly after May 2008, when Thierry was detained. Elizaran, age 30, reportedly is the one who gave political orders to ETA and to the "izquierda abertzale" (or Basque patriotic left). Oihana San Vicente, a key deputy of Elizaran's, also was arrested. Both were armed and carrying false identification and computers. Rubalcaba publicly has described the information gathered from the duo's arrest as "very valuable."

15. (SBU) French and Spanish security forces reportedly believe that Elizaran was dual-hatted as ETA's primary spokesperson and served as one of the masked figures who regularly appear in video communiques released by the terrorist group. The vast array of items recovered from the stolen car in which Elizaran was traveling led the Spanish press to describe the vehicle as a kind of "mobile propaganda unit." Among the items discovered were three sets of black berets, white masks, and jackets embroidered with the ETA

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seal similar to those used in ETA's video messages. In the house in Carnac where Elizaran was staying, police also found a video library, ETA flags, and other assorted symbolic emblems used during videotaped messages.

//Arrest of "Board of Directors" for Nascent, ETA-Aligned Political Party//

16. (SBU) The detention of Elizaran and San Vicente occurred six days after the detention of Arnaldo Otegi and nine other leaders of the izquierda abertzale for trying to establish "Bateragune" (whose name translates to "All Together") as a replacement political party for Batasuna, which was outlawed in 2003 for its ties to ETA. The suspects could face 15 years in jail for belonging to a terrorist group and for obeying orders from ETA. It is believed that Elizaran was delivering directives to the 10 suspects in this case, although initial press reports have acknowledged that proof of this may not (yet) be available. On October 16 Investigating Judge Baltasar Garzon of Spain's National Court ordered Otegi, the former spokesman of Batasuna and the public face of radical Basque nationalists, to be kept in preventative detention. Otegi - whom Spanish security services believe goes by the name of "Ronaldinho" in internal ETA correspondence - also was reportedly seen in France with ETA members prior to the late July attacks that marked ETA's 50th anniversary.

//ETA's Reported Number-Two Military Official Arrested//

17. (SBU) On October 11, alleged ETA members Iurgi Mendinueta Mintego and Joanes Larretxea Mendiola were arrested in France as part of a joint Spanish GC-French Police operation. Mendinueta, who also reportedly was close to Txeroki, reportedly was the number-two official in ETA's military wing and had been on the lam since 2002. Some press reports earlier this year had identified him as one of three likely candidates to take over the military wing after Txeroki's successor was arrested. Meanwhile, Larretxea's mug shot had

been included in a "Most Wanted" poster disseminated by the Spanish Ministry of Interior after the late July 2009 ETA attacks in Burgos and Mallorca, the latter of which claimed two GC victims. Both men are believed to be part of ETA's military arm, and they were arrested in possession of weapons, detonators, detonator cords, fake documentation, and various pen drives. At the suspected terrorist hide-out, police discovered fake license plates and the machinery to make them. Those operations were unrelated to the arrest of another ETA member, Ibai Seuskun, in France on October 10. Seuskun, on the run from Navarra police for over a year, sought help for a gunshot wound in his hand, and the owners of the farm where he sought aid turned him in to police after he identified himself as an ETA member.

//Arrest of Trio, including Alleged Logistics Chief and Senior Military Wing Official, ...//

18. (SBU) French security forces, aided by the Spanish National Police, arrested three alleged members of ETA's military logistics wing on the morning of August 19 in Le Corbier, in the French Alps. Aitzol Etxaburu, Alberto Machain Beraza, Andoni Sarasola - all reportedly armed and carrying false identity papers - were allegedly in charge of providing weapons and explosives to cells for terrorist attacks in Spain. Etxaburu, also known for his close ties to Txeroki, had been on the run since his alleged involvement in a 2005 car bomb attack in the Basque Region. He reportedly became ETA's short-lived logistics chief following the July 2009 arrest of Itziar Plaza (see Ref B). Like Larretxea, Machain rose to public prominence weeks earlier after his picture appeared as one of the six ETA suspects wanted in connection with the late July 2009 ETA attacks. Sarasola, a one-time candidate for the radical left in local politics, was profiled in the Spanish media earlier this year as one of the three top leaders - along with Mendinueta - of ETA's military wing following the back-to-back arrests of Txeroki and his successor in late 2008. Sarasola's brother, Martin, was one of the those responsible for the deadly December 2006 bombing of the T4 parking garage at the Madrid airport that brought a de facto end to ETA's "permanent unilateral ceasefire."

//... Leads to Largest Arms Cache Seizures Since 2004//

19. (C) In the week following the August 19 arrests, French

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and Spanish authorities located 14 "zulos" or hidden arms caches in France. These raids resulted in the capture of nearly a ton of explosives, more than 200 kilos of ammonium nitrate, dozens of weapons, 7,000 rounds of ammunition, 150 license plates, roughly 250 detonators, a slew of documents, forged ID cards, radios, mobile phone cards, tools for stealing cars, etc. Two ETA caches discovered on August 20 alone exceeded the total amount of explosive material seized from ETA in all of 2008 and together was sufficient to have made 100 limpet bombs or to have carried out at least 50 attacks, according to the media. In a rare public statement, Parisian prosecutor Jean-Claude Marin told reporters on August 25 that the week-long crackdown was "a major blow to ETA's supply network. There hasn't been a find on this scale since 2004." Oscar Beltran, editor of Bilbao-based El Correo newspaper, was more skeptical, however, noting ETA traditionally safeguards its operations by compartmentalizing its members' knowledge and duplicating its efforts. On September 9 he told POLOFF that while the arrest of these three individuals led to the seizure of 14 zulos, it is very likely another three individuals know of another 14 zulos.

CHACON